**Co-Convenors Report to Biennial General Meeting**

Hannah Reeve and Rev Peter Weeks

5 June 2020

It seems such a long time ago since the Brisbane Daring in 2018 when we were elected co-convenors. Much has happened in the following two years which is detailed below.

1. **Marriage in the Uniting Church**

Just a month after Daring the Uniting Church Assembly approved an alternate definition of marriage (“between two people”), and authorised the preparation of a revised liturgy reflecting the new definition. Both of us were Assembly members from our Synods. This was an exhausting, emotional process for all involved, with daily sessions dedicated to the topic either in working groups or plenary sessions. The decision came at the very end of the week.

While Uniting Church ministers and congregations are free to operate under the previous definition (“between a man and a woman”), UNA welcomes the change. Note: this does not mean that there is one rite for opposite-sex marriages and a separate one for same-sex couples. Those who choose to operate under the “two people” definition will use the same rite for all weddings. Local Church Councils get to make the decision about whether marriages under the new definition can be conducted in their churches.

Since the last Daring, both co-convenors have married their long-term partners according to the new rites and have appreciated hearing the stories of weddings around Australia.

1. **Church Apology for Past Treatment of LGBTIQ Australians**

A proposal to begin a process towards an Assembly Apology was tabled at the Assembly and referred to the Standing Committee. This proposal to form a working group to explore this further was agreed and Warren Talbot has been working on this on our behalf, and there are more details in his report. We are hopeful that a meaningful Apology will be presented and approved by Assembly 2024.

1. **Open and Affirming Congregations**

We were very excited to be able to launch this comprehensive set of resources put together by a team led by Rev Rod Pattenden in 2019. A formal launch took place at the Synod of NSW/ACT, with a follow-up promotion at the Synod of VicTas and a launch in Queensland with Equal Voices. We hope all those attending Daring take the opportunity to engage with the resources and look at ways to encourage their church or other congregations to explore what it means to be open and affirming.

1. **Response to Religious Discrimination bills**

Much energy has been expended in making submissions and representations to the Government and Members of Parliament regarding the Government’s proposed Religious Freedom Bill and expressing our concerns that this gives religious groups freedom to discriminate including towards LGBTIQ+ people. Thank you to Jason Masters for organising letters to be sent to every members of Parliament and leading these efforts.

Official submissions have been sent to the Parliamentary Inquiry, both by UNA and by the Assembly. In Melbourne, Peter was invited to meet with the Shadow Attorney-General to present UNA’s position, and also spoke at a rally opposing the Bill. Hannah also was in contact with the UCA Assembly team to ensure the concerns of LGBTIQ people where communicated and considered as part of a wider UCA response.

1. **UnitingCare Australia**

As you will read in Warren’s report, there is a good working relationship between us and UnitingCare as consultation continues towards a nationally consistent policy around LGBTIQ+ people. We wish to extend our gratitude to Warren for his work on this.

1. **Daring 2020**

The team from South Australia worked hard to put together in Daring Conference for 2020 which was due to meet in Adelaide over this June long weekend. Unfortunately, in March we had to make the decision to postpone the event until 2021 due to COVID-19. Thanks to their initiative, we look forward to the special Daring Online event. Thank you to the Unity & Friends team in Adelaide and especially to Melissa Krollig. We look forward to be able to meet in person in 2021.

1. **A Final Note**

It has been a privilege to serve as co-convenors over these two years. Personal circumstances mean that neither of us are able to offer ourselves to continue in the role.

Thank you to all of the UNA Executive team for all their hard work in the very busy two years and for all we got done in that team. We pray God’s blessing on the new co-convenors and on the ongoing work of the executive on behalf of us all.